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Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Docket 18-336, Docket 92-105
Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018

Dear Commissioners:

I am a volunteer at Alameda County Crisis Support Services, the local crisis hotline serving my home county in California. I write to urge you to designate and fund a 3-digit dialing code (N11) for a national Suicide Prevention Crisis Hotline System.

Here's why I think this is important to get done:

1. Rates of death by suicide are growing rapidly

American citizens are dying from suicide at the highest rate in decades. Just last week, the Centers for Disease Control reported that over 47,000 Americans died by suicide last year. **Forty-seven thousand.**

2. The Lifeline saves lives

In 2004, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration launched the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline as a national effort to reach people in crisis using the number 1-800-273-8255 as a uniform access point to connect to crisis services.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has been a tremendous success – growing from just a few calls that first year to over two million last year, including over 700,000 calls to the national Veterans Crisis Line. This in spite of a long 1-800 number that is not easy to remember and access.

Extensive, independent research has proven the effectiveness of crisis intervention using trained counselors. Every day, counselors take the time to listen to callers and offer basic human connection, helping them cope with suicidal crisis and other mental health challenges. Often it is the mere act of talking to another person that allows callers to weather an emotionally intense period in their lives.

3. Easier access to the Lifeline will result in more saved lives

The Congressional special mandate to the Commission has recommended the designation of a 3-digit dialing code (N11) for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system, making it easier for Americans to get help when they need it most.

Three-digit access will:

- Deliver timely and effective suicide prevention services to millions of Americans
- Make it easier to connect people in suicidal distress with help
- Meet the *dramatically* growing need for suicide prevention

Three-digit access is a natural next step given the growth and proven effectiveness of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

4. Why not just use 211?

There are reports that the Commission has received comments suggesting that 211 Info be used for 3-digit access for suicide and mental health crises. I strongly disagree with this suggestion.

211 Info provides a vital service – connection to rent assistance, energy assistance, maternal health services, and information regarding pesticides, radon remediation services – a vast array of social services. But 211 Info's mission and expertise do not include mental health services – and the reality is that crisis calls to 211 generally result in referral to the local National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's crisis center.

Rather than expediting access to crisis intervention services as Congress intends, using 211 as a crisis portal would only *add* a layer of time and delay to people in crisis who need help *now*.

5. While we're at it, please fund local crisis centers:

A vital next step is to adequately fund the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Over the past several years, the VA has provided the resources necessary to support callers who press 1 after calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. These 700,000 calls are routed to more than 1,000 VA staff across three national call centers on the Veteran's Crisis Line (VCL), with annual support of \$90 million. This funding assures a timely and consistent service akin to 9-1-1.

However, apart from some administrative overhead, there is **no** material federal funding for the crisis centers who manage calls to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This means that local, county and state crisis lines must leverage unused capacity and/or volunteer support. The heroic efforts of these centers have made the difference in the lives of millions of people, but this is an unsustainable model.

Funding will be critical to the success of a National Suicide Prevention Crisis Hotline system.

Thank you very much for your interest and thoughtful approach to this important issue that affects hundreds of millions of lives in our country every year.

Respectfully yours,



James Riley
Volunteer
Crisis Support Services of Alameda County, California